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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7523
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 8928
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 2332
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 4988
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI IMMEDIATE 6645
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA IMMEDIATE
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 004262

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: ABE RESIGNS

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, reasons 1.4 (b),(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Abe sent shock waves through Japan's political world on September 12 with his sudden announcement that he will resign. As for the reason behind his decision, he offered his concern that his continued tenure as PM is making it difficult for Japan to live up to its international commitments (OEF legislation extension). The move caught his own party by surprise, coming just three days into the new Diet session, and one day after he reiterated his commitment to pursuing his legislative agenda. Abe and his cabinet will remain in place until the LDP elects his replacement as LDP president, which news reports indicate could happen as early as September 19. The new LDP president will then be voted in as prime minister by the LDP-controlled Lower House. This schedule would presumably allow Japan's new Prime Minister to speak during Japan's UNGA slot the evening of September 25. In the meantime, Diet business will likely grind to a halt, delaying action on the anti-terror bill. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Shinzo Abe announced his intention to step down as Prime Minister and President of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), citing his concern that his continued tenure as PM is making it difficult for Japan to live up to its international commitments by passing legislation to permit Japan to continue to contribute to OEF. In an early afternoon press conference on September 12, Abe unexpectedly told reporters that he thought it would be better for a new leader to take the helm, since it would be difficult for him to regain public confidence and unify the party. He said that he had only decided to step down that morning, and the first word on the resignation came from LDP Secretary General Aso around noon. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yosano and Foreign Minister Machimura appeared unaware of Abe's plans in meetings with the Ambassador just minutes before word of the Prime Minister's press conference. Other Embassy contacts uniformly expressed surprise at the sudden announcement. Some claimed Abe had resigned for unnamed health reasons, speculation that was supported by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yosano's subsequent reference to concerns about Abe's health, particularly after his return from a trip to India and Southeast Asia. Others offered that some sort of brewing scandal was about to emerge. Both LDP lawmakers and opposition leaders quickly labeled Abe's planned resignation as "irresponsible" in their public comments.

¶3. (C) Prime Minister Abe and his ministers will continue in their positions until a new Prime Minister is elected by the Lower House, in accordance with the Japanese Constitution. Given the LDP's overwhelming dominance in the lower chamber, Abe will be replaced as Prime Minister by his successor as president of the LDP, who will be chosen in accordance with internal LDP rules. According to current regulations, if there is a single candidate for LDP president, the election can be held almost immediately. If there are multiple candidates, then the election must be announced at least 12 twelve days prior to the election date to allow for a period of campaigning.

¶4. (C) That said, because these are internal rules, they can be changed, and there is pressure on the party to have a new president, and thus Prime Minister, in place in time to give Japan's speech at UNGA during its slot the evening of September 25. As such, and according to NHK television, candidates for LDP president will declare their candidacies by September 14, and the election will be held on September ¶19. Regardless of the exact timing, the election will eat into the new Diet session and delay further action on Japan's anti-terror legislation.
Schieffer